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(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): BIOSTAR B.V. [NL/NL]; P.O. Box 52, NL-8560 AB Balk (NL).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): BUISMAN, Cees, Jan, Nico [NL/NL]; Stinsenwei 1, NL-8571 RH Harich (NL). DIJKMAN, Hendrik [NL/NL]; Geewwkade 8, NL-8651 AA Ijlst (NL). VERBAAK, Petrus, Leonardus [NL/NL]; Kievitshof 6, NL-1383 GJ Weesp (NL). DEN HARTOG, Adrianus, Johannes [NL/NL]; Aert van Neslaan 542, NL-2341 HT Oegstgeest (NL).

(74) Agent: DE BRUIJN, Leendert, C.; Nederlandsch Octrooibureau, Scheveningsweg 82, P.O. Box 29720, NL-2502 LS The Hague (NL).

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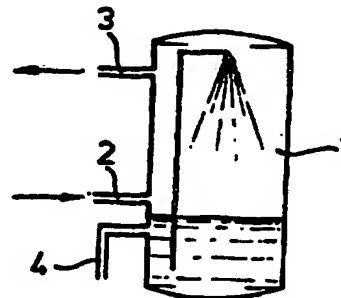
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(54) Title: PROCESS FOR PURIFYING FLUE GAS CONTAINING NITROGEN OXIDES

(57) Abstract

The invention provides a process and a device for purifying flue gas containing nitrogen oxides, in which the flue gas is scrubbed with a circulating scrubbing liquid which contains a transition metal chelate such as Fe(II) EDTA and the complex formed from nitrogen oxide and transition metal chelate and/or spent transition metal chelate is regenerated biologically in the presence of an electron donor, nitrogen oxide being reduced to molecular nitrogen. The biological reactor can be combined with the gas scrubber. The electron donor is, for example, hydrogen or methanol, but may also be sulphite which originates from sulphur dioxide in the flue gas.



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Process for purifying flue gas containing nitrogen oxides

The invention relates to a process for purifying flue gas containing nitrogen oxides, in which the flue gas is scrubbed with a circulating scrubbing liquid which contains a transition metal chelate, the chelate forms a complex with nitrogen oxide, nitrogen oxide is reduced to molecular nitrogen, and the chelate is subsequently regenerated.

Such a process is disclosed, for example, in Dutch Patent Applications 7500672, 7500673, 7515009, 7607212 and 8602001, and European Patent Application 531762. The transition metal chelate, usually iron(II)-EDTA, is used to complex and thus to effectively absorb the nitrogen oxides, of which NO is very sparingly dissolved by scrubbing water that does not contain a transition metal chelate.

The known processes each involve the simultaneous removal of nitrogen oxides (mainly NO and NO₂), hereinafter referred to as NO_x, and sulphur dioxide, molecular nitrogen (N₂) and sulphates or amide-sulphates and many other N-S compounds generally as well as N₂O being ultimately obtained. The processing of the sulphates, N₂O and nitrogen-sulphur compounds is, however, complicated and requires various subsequent treatments with associated equipment. N₂O will be emitted with the flue gas. This is an unwanted effect since N₂O is a compound known for its strong detrimental effect on the ozone layer and its strong greenhouse effect.

Another important problem is that, in the oxidising medium, the active Fe(II) is partially converted to the much less active Fe(III) by oxygen from the flue gas or indirectly by sulphite in the scrubbing liquid. This results in high losses of the chelate. In addition, flue gas usually contains too little sulphur dioxide (sulphite) in relation to nitrogen oxides for the complete regeneration of the NO-bonded Fe(II)-EDTA complex to its active form. Such methods have therefore not yet acquired large-scale application.

In a process which is already used in practice for the removal of nitrogen oxides from flue gases, the flue gas is contacted at 300°C with ammonia (NH₃) and a catalyst, in which process nitrogen is produced. This process, the so-called selective catalytic reduction (SCR) process, however, is expensive, both as a result of the high

investment costs associated with the high-temperature installations and as a result of the high operational costs associated with the ammonia and the catalyst (approximately one third of the catalyst has to be replaced every year). In addition, a completely separate process is necessary for the optional removal of sulphur dioxide from the same flue gas.

The invention relates to a process which allows nitrogen oxides to be efficiently removed from flue gases for appreciably lower investment and operating costs, in which the NOx removal may optionally be combined with removal of sulphur dioxide. Surprisingly, it has been found that a complex of a transition metal chelate and nitrogen oxide can effectively be regenerated microbiologically to molecular nitrogen and the regenerated transition metal chelate. In this process, the transition metal is kept in the more active, lower oxidation state or returned to the lower oxidation state.

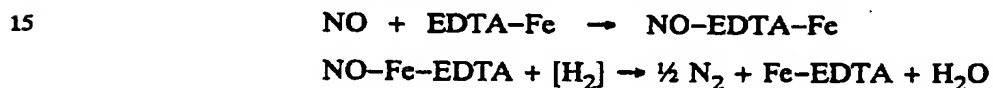
The process according to the invention as described in the introduction is therefore characterised in that the transition metal chelate is biologically regenerated in the presence of an electron donor. Where reference is made herein to chelate, this is understood to mean the complex of chelating agent and transition metal.

The biological regeneration according to the invention therefore involves the complex of nitrogen oxide and transition metal chelate, or the transition metal chelate without nitrogen oxide. In the former case, nitrogen oxide is reduced with concomitant release of active chelate; in the latter case, inactive chelate wherein the transition metal is in a higher oxidation state is regenerated to active chelate wherein the metal is again in a lower oxidation state. A major advantage of this process is that any chelate that is consumed by other processes and would thus not be available for binding NOx, is returned to its active form. In principle, the inactive form of the chelate could be regenerated e.g. by the addition of a chemical reducing agent or by electrochemical reduction, but in practice this is undesirable because of the higher costs and complications in the scrubbing cycle.

As transition metal that forms a complex with nitrogen oxide when chelated, use may be made of a metal such as iron, manganese, zinc, cobalt, nickel or aluminium. For economic and environmental reasons, iron(II), which is kept in the divalent state in the process according to the invention, is preferred. The transition

metal chelate is formed with a chelating agent which has available at least two free electron pairs for chelation with the metal, in the form of amino groups, carboxyl groups or hydroxyl groups. Examples are polyamines such as ethylenediamine, diethylenetriamine, triethylenetetraamine, hexamethylenetetraamine, and 1,4,7-
5 triazonane and their N-alkylated analogues such as polyamines such as ethylenediamine which contain one to four hydroxyethyl groups and/or carboxymethyl groups, for example N-(2-hydroxyethyl)ethylenediamine-triacetic acid and, in particular, ethylenediamine-tetraacetic acid (EDTA), iminodiacetic acid and nitrilo-
10 triacetic acid (NTA) and salts thereof. The concentration of the transition metal chelate may vary according to the specific scrubbing process parameters. A suitable concentration can be e.g. 1-200 mM, in particular 25-150 mM.

In the process according to the invention, the following reactions occur, in which NO is chosen as nitrogen oxide and iron(II) ethylenediaminetetraacetate is chosen by way of example of transition metal chelate:



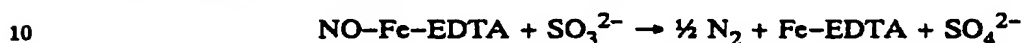
In this reaction, the hydrogen may be molecular hydrogen. The hydrogen may also be present as (organic) electron donor, for example as methanol, which is oxidised to carbon dioxide under the circumstances, or ethanol. It may also be in the
20 form of other organic matter (COD) contained in the liquid (waste) stream.

The scrubbing of the flue gas can be carried out in a conventional gas scrubber. The biological regeneration of the complex of transition metal chelate and nitrogen oxide may be carried out in the scrubber itself, or in a separate bioreactor. The biomass required for the biological regeneration contains known nitrate-reducing
25 bacteria.

A device for the removal of NO_x from waste gases in which the biological regeneration takes place in the scrubber is shown diagrammatically in Figure 1. In such a device, the gas is brought into intimate contact with the scrubbing liquid containing the transition metal chelate and the biomass, for example by means of
30 nozzles and optionally packing material. An electron donor such as methanol is added to the scrubbing liquid. The nitrogen formed and any carbon dioxide are removed with the purified gas.

The variant in which the biological regeneration is carried out in a separate bioreactor is shown diagrammatically in Figure 2. In such a device, the scrubbing liquid contains the transition metal chelate and the scrubbing liquid used is conveyed to the bioreactor which contains the biomass and to which an electron donor is added.

The process according to the invention can readily be combined with flue-gas desulphurisation, in which case the sulphur dioxide absorbed from the flue gas can fulfil the function of reducing agent (electron donor). The regeneration could then proceed according to the reaction below:



The sulphate formed in this process can be removed in a conventional manner (precipitation with calcium), but is preferably removed biologically. The sulphate, possibly with residual sulphite, is therefore anaerobically reduced, mainly to sulphide, and the sulphide formed in this process is then oxidised under limited aerobic conditions to elemental sulphur, which is separated off.

A problem with the conventional process is that the reaction producing molecular nitrogen is just one of several reaction occurring and often it is not even the main reaction. Product like amide-sulphates and similar compounds, as well as N_2O are formed. These products results in contamination of the flue gas (N_2O) and of the bleed water (amide-sulphates). In the process of the invention, these components are also converted to unarmful products, and thus unwanted emissions are prevented.

The reduction of NO_x can also be achieved by the presence of other reduced sulphur compounds such as sulphide, hydrosulphide, sulphur, thiosulphate or polythionate. Such sulphur compounds may originate directly or indirectly from flue gases, or be added separately, for example from liquid waste flows.

If sulphur dioxide and other sulphur compounds are used as reducing agent, the biological regeneration of the complex of transition metal chelate and nitrogen oxide can also be carried out in the scrubber itself or in a separate bioreactor. A device for the process in which the nitrogen reduction is carried out in the scrubber is shown in Figure 3. The redox potential in the scrubbing liquid containing biomass is in this case preferably kept high enough to avoid sulphate reduction to occur

because this may result in undesirable H_2S emission. Preferably, the redox potential is kept above -280 mV, in particular above -200 mV (using an Ag/AgCl reference electrode). The redox potential can be controlled by means of the addition of electron donor.

5 In contrast to the system according to Figure 1, the scrubbing liquid should be post-treated outside the scrubber in the case of reduction with sulphur dioxide in order to remove the sulphate formed and residual sulphite. That can be done by means of a precipitation tank for forming gypsum (not shown). According to a preferred embodiment, the sulphate is worked up microbiologically by consecutive
10 reduction to sulphide in an anaerobic reactor and oxidation of the sulphide to elemental sulphur in an aerobic reactor, as shown in Figure 3.

The same process, but with nitrogen reduction in a separate bioreactor, can be carried out according to the system of Figure 4. In this case an anoxic bioreactor for reducing nitrogen oxide, an anaerobic reactor for sulphate reduction and an
15 aerobic reactor for sulphide oxidation are consecutively connected downstream of the scrubber.

The reduction of nitrogen can also be carried out in one of the sulphur reactors. This variant can be carried out in accordance with the system of Figure 5. The NO_x together with sulphate/sulphite can be reduced to nitrogen and sulphide, respectively, by a mixed anaerobic biomass. The residual NO_x in the last, aerobic reactor
20 can also be converted to molecular nitrogen by reaction with sulphide, elemental sulphur and possibly thiosulphate. Reduction of NO_x to N_2 in the final, aerobic reactor is generally preferred because less electron donor has to be added in that case. For that purpose, it may be necessary to shorten the residence time in the
25 anaerobic reactor so that not all the NO_x is already fully reduced therein.

If the gas to be purified contains, in addition to nitrogen oxides, too low a concentration of sulphur dioxide, there may be insufficient sulphite present in the bioreactor to reduce the nitrogen oxide completely. Another electron donor (for example alcohol) will then have to be added.

30 An important factor that prohibited the use of the Fe chelate up to now is the oxidation of the active Fe(II) form to the inactive Fe(III) form by oxygen from the flue gas or by sulphite. According to the present invention, any Fe(III) formed is

reduced by or in the presence of the bacteria. The biological reactor could be used only to reduce the inactive Fe(III) into the active Fe(II) form and make the system more cost efficient.

5 The biological reduction of nitrogen oxide (that is to say, the regeneration of the transition metal complex) is carried out at approximately neutral pH, for example a pH between 5 and 9.5, and at elevated temperature, for example 25 to 95°C, in particular 35 to 70°C.

Description of the figures:

10 Figure 1 shows a device according to the invention for removing nitrogen oxides in a single scrubber/reactor. In this figure, 1 is a gas scrubber having a gas inlet 2 and a gas outlet 3 and having means (e.g. nozzles, packing material) which bring about an effective liquid/gas contact. In this case, the liquid in the gas scrubber contains the denitrifying biomass. Electron donor can be added via line 4.

15 Figure 2 shows a device for removing nitrogen oxides in a separate bio-reactor. Gas scrubber 1 having gas inlet 2 and gas outlet 3 and having contact means is in this case connected to anoxic reactor 5, to outlet line 6 and return line 7. Electron donor can be added via line 8 and gases, mainly nitrogen, can escape via 9.

20 Figure 3 shows a device for removing nitrogen oxides and sulphur oxides with denitrification in the scrubber. Gas scrubber 1 having gas inlet 2, gas outlet 3, contact means and having inlet 4 for electron donor in this case contains the denitrifying biomass and is connected via line 6 to anaerobic reactor 10 containing sulphate- and sulphite-reducing biomass. Electron donor can be added through line 11 and any gases can escape via 12 and, if necessary, be post-treated. The anaerobic reactor 10 is connected via line 14 to aerobic reactor 13 which contains sulphide-oxidising biomass and is provided with an air inlet 15 and gas outlet 16. Connected downstream of reactor 13 is a separator 17 with outlet 18 for sulphur. Separator 17 is connected via line 7 to the gas scrubber 1 for the purpose of returning scrubbing water.

25 Figure 4 shows a device for removing nitrogen oxides and sulphur oxides with separate denitrification. Gas scrubber 1 having gas inlet 2 and gas outlet 3 and having contact means is connected via outlet line 6 to anoxic reactor 5. The anoxic reactor 5 has an inlet for electron donor 8 and gas outlet 9. Connected downstream of

30

the denitrifying reactor 5 are the anaerobic reactor 10, the aerobic reactor 13, and the separator 17, as in Figure 3.

Figure 5 shows a device for removing nitrogen oxides and sulphur oxides, with denitrification in the anaerobic sulphur reactor. Gas scrubber 1 having gas inlet 2 and gas outlet 3 and having contact means is in this case connected to anaerobic reactor 10, which is provided with electron donor inlet 11 and gas outlet (for, inter alia, nitrogen) 9. Connected downstream of the denitrifying/sulphate- and sulphite-reducing anaerobic reactor 10 is the aerobic reactor 13, as in Figure 3.

Example 1

The performance of the nitrate-reducing bacteria is studied on a laboratory scale installation. This installation consists of a scrubber and a separate bioreactor. Besides the Fe-EDTA solution, pure NO is led through the scrubber, resulting in a total conversion of Fe-EDTA into NO-Fe-EDTA. Subsequently the NO-Fe-EDTA complex is converted in the bioreactor to Fe-EDTA and N₂ using ethanol as an electron donor. The volume of the bioreactor is 5 dm³. After the treatment, the liquid is returned to the scrubber where Fe-EDTA can again undergo complexation with NO. During the experiments, the temperature is kept constant at 50°C and pH at 7.0. The Fe-EDTA concentrations used are up to a value of 40 mM. The bacteria convert the NO-Fe-EDTA complex to Fe-EDTA and N₂ through the following equation:



The highest NO-Fe-EDTA load tested is 5.0 kg nitrogen/m³ day, which is completely converted by the bacteria. The maximum NO-Fe-EDTA load that can be handled by the bacteria has not been observed yet. Toxicity tests have shown that the bacteria are not inhibited by Fe-EDTA up to a concentration of 40 mM. It is expected from these experiments that higher Fe-EDTA levels can be used. Toxicity of Fe-EDTA above this concentration was not determined. During the experiments no chelate degradation was observed. In addition to the regeneration of the NO-Fe-EDTA complex, the bacteria have shown their capability of reducing inactive Fe(III)-EDTA to active Fe(II)-EDTA. The Fe(III)-EDTA is formed due to reaction of Fe(II)-EDTA with oxygen present in the flue gas, and due to reaction of NO-Fe-EDTA with sulphite. In the corresponding experiments air instead of NO is led

through the scrubber, resulting in complete oxidation of Fe(II)-EDTA to Fe(III)-EDTA. Subsequently Fe(II)-EDTA is recovered in the bioreactor. At a 5 mM Fe(III)-EDTA influent concentration and a hydraulic retention time of 1.5 hour in the bioreactor the bacteria have shown complete reduction to Fe(II)-EDTA. Higher Fe(III)-EDTA concentrations have not been applied.

Example 2

A flue gas flowing at 45,000 m³/h and containing 670 mg/m³ SO₂ (250 ppm v/v) and 1670 mg/m³ NO_x (expressed in NO, contains 5 - 20% NO₂) (1340 ppm v/v) is treated in a flue-gas purification installation as shown in Figure 5. The scrubber has a volume of 70 m³ and the scrubbing water flow rate is 600 m³/h. The anaerobic reactor has a volume of 275 m³ and the aerobic reactor has a volume of 45 m³. The circulation flow through the bioreactors is 110 m³/h. The scrubbing water contains 3 g Fe-EDTA per l. The efficiency of SO_x removal is 99% and the efficiency of NO_x removal is 75 - 80%.

Claims

1. Process for purifying flue gas containing nitrogen oxides, in which the flue gas is scrubbed with a circulating scrubbing liquid containing a transition metal chelate, the chelate forms a complex with nitrogen oxide, the chelate is subsequently regenerated and nitrogen oxide is reduced to molecular nitrogen, characterised in that the transition metal chelate is biologically regenerated in the presence of an electron donor.
2. Process according to Claim 1, in which the transition metal chelate is Fe(II) EDTA.
3. Process according to Claim 1 or 2, in which the electron donor is methanol, ethanol, or a COD-containing stream.
4. Process according to Claim 1 or 2, in which the electron donor is hydrogen.
5. Process according to one of Claims 1 - 4, in which the regeneration is carried out in the same device as that in which the flue gas is scrubbed.
6. Process according to one of Claims 1 - 5, in which the electron donor is sulphite.
7. Process according to Claim 6, in which the sulphite originates from sulphur dioxide present in the flue gas.
8. Process according to one of Claims 1 - 5, in which the electron donor is a reducing sulphur compound other than sulphite, such as sulphide, hydrosulphide, sulphur, thiosulphate or polythionate.
9. Process according to one of Claims 6 - 8, in which sulphite or the reduced sulphur compound and any sulphate formed is biologically reduced to sulphide, the sulphide formed is then oxidised to elemental sulphur and the sulphur formed is separated off.

10. Process according to Claim 9, in which the regeneration of the complex of nitrogen oxide and transition metal chelate is carried out in the same device as that in which sulphite and/or sulphate is reduced.
- 5 11. Device for purifying flue gas, comprising a gas scrubber (1), provided with nozzles and optional packing material for effectively bringing gas and liquid into contact, gas inlet (2) and gas outlet (3), and inlet line (4), as well as at least two liquid tanks (10) and (13) and a solids separator (17) with connecting lines (6), (14) and (7).
- 10 12. Device for purifying flue gas, comprising a gas scrubber (1), provided with nozzles and optional packing material for effectively bringing gas and liquid into contact, gas inlet (2) and gas outlet (3), as well as at least one liquid tank (5) with inlet line (8) and connecting lines (6) and (7) and optionally two liquid tanks (10) and (13) and a solids separator (17) with connecting lines (19, 14).

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fig-1

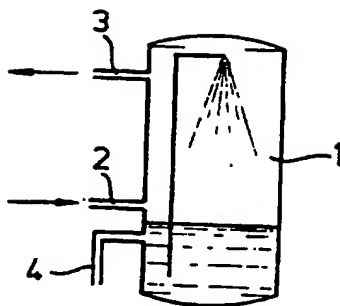


fig-2

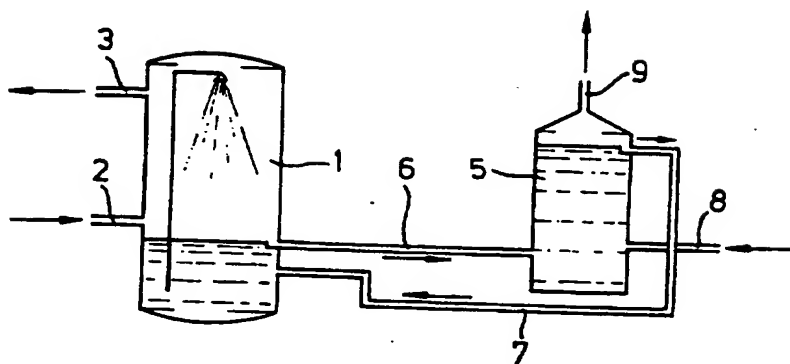


fig-3

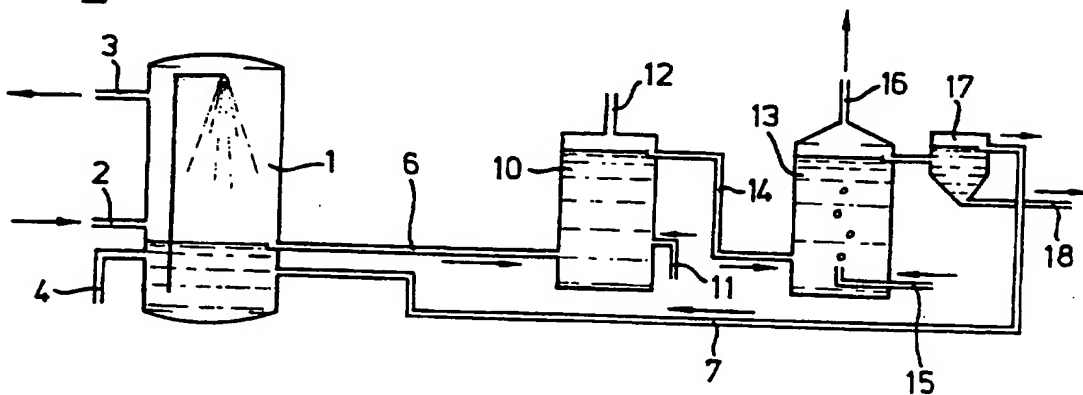


fig-4

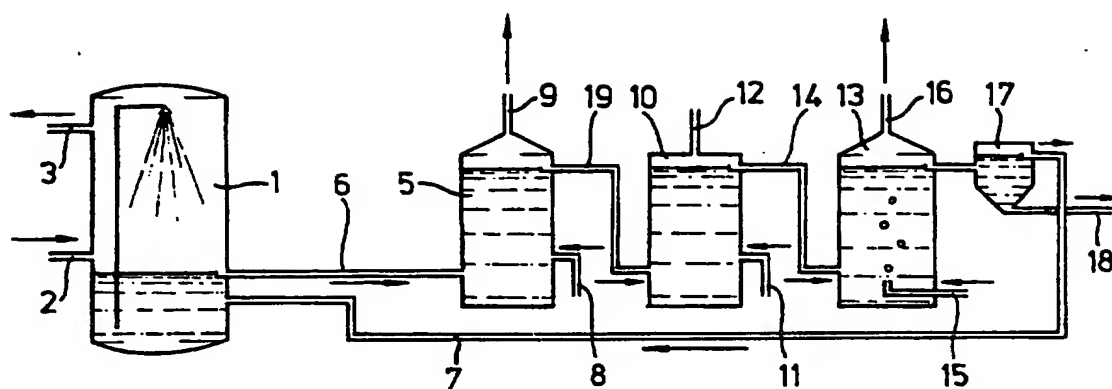
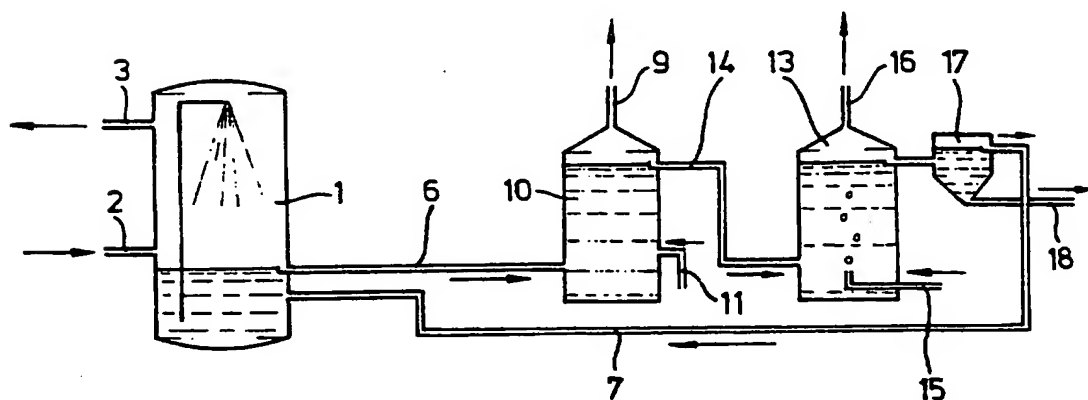


fig-5



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